

John Dean Behind the Mask of Sanity

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In the middle of April Luis Harris published the results of a recent American public opinion poll. According to which 52 per cent of Americans trust John Dean's accusations against President Nixon, 28 per cent do not believe Dean while 20 percent do not have an opinion. So, the majority of Americans, by believing Dean, apparently did not bother to pay attention to reports about some of the strange personality traits of Nixon's only accuser. Some of the details of Dean's behavior must appear suspiciously familiar to Russian readers.

Newspapers persist in asserting that Dean "exposed Watergate criminals," including the President. The word "exposed" has dominated the press. Those who believed Dean impatiently expected a "soul bearing admittance of guilt", an announcement of the President's resignation or his conviction by the courts and Congress. If one is to look closely at John Dean, the central figure behind all the scandalous accusations, then such expectations appear fantastic.

When the existence of the tape recordings of White House conversations was revealed, Dean, on hearing the news, started to dance during a party at his home. At that moment he triumphantly declared that these recordings would confirm his testimony. Nevertheless, reports appearing in the press reveal that neither the recordings nor the results of the cross-examination in the courts or the documents confirm Dean's testimony. Just the opposite, the slowly emerging picture, seemingly hard to explain, shows, that many details of Dean's testimony appear shifted in time and place. What supposedly happened, according to Dean's testimony, on certain days, actually happened at different times and under absolutely different circumstances. Moreover, words and complete sentences, which Dean attributed to various defendants, actually were uttered by Dean himself. No less interesting is the fact that almost all of the words remained unchanged, while the meaning of the sentences turned out to be absolutely different. For the most part, Nixon's old enemies advanced suppositions that such differences should be attributed to forgeries of the recordings and documents. Nixon's loyalists, on the other hand, are convinced that Dean is simply a liar. Nevertheless, a different explanation deserves attention: Dean's serious psychopathology, only hidden behind an appearance of sanity. To understand this pathology it is necessary to compare Dean's statements with his acts and to look for explanations for these contradictions found in psychiatric literature. In particular, the well known work of Dr. Harvey Cleckley, M.D. "The Mask of Sanity" (Third Edition, ST. LOUIS, THE C.V. MOSBY CO., 1955) contains the key to understanding Dean's pathology.

In describing a pathological personality, Dr. Cleckley cited many examples which show that statements made by a psychopath have nothing to do with his behavior or goals. Dr. Cleckley writes: “Completely hidden under apparently normal performance, a serious psychic abnormality influences a psychopath’s behavior, directing his perfect abilities toward needless or greatly undesirable, and possibly, even towards achievement, consciously and effectively, destructive and anti-social... Psychopath himself, more than the people who surround him, is fooled by his apparent normalcy.... To a great extent he is incapable of dedifferentiating his pseudo intentions, his pseudo regrets, and his pseudo love and so on from real feelings of normal people... When other people do not accept his *word of honor*, his surprise is quite real. His subjective experience is so devoid of depth of feelings, that he absolutely does not understand the meaning of the life of other people” Cleckley continues to say: “A psychopath usually is accepted by the courts as a quite sane person, but this technical sanity does not differ much from the simple mimicry of real sanity.” Dr. Cleckley concludes that: “One is confronted with a convincing mask of sanity.” (p. 423)

Dr. Cleckley’s observations could be illustrated by the examples from Dean’s statements. Dean stated that on September 15th 1972, President Nixon congratulated him with the successful destruction of the Watergate Scandal’s evidence. As proof, Dean quoted what Nixon supposedly said. Dean stated that on September 15th 1973, Nixon congratulated him on the successful handling of the cover-up, stating that Nixon had told him, “Bob tells me you are doing a good job...” Senator Gurney of Florida quite naturally was doubtful: “How can you say that the President knew all about those things from a simple observation by him that ‘Bob tells me you are doing a good job.’” This led Dean to change Nixon’s wording slightly and to complain: “We are quibbling over words.” To this Gurney quite pointedly replied: “We are talking about something very important: the guilt or innocence of the President of the United States.” Dean was unable to foresee that the words he had attributed to Nixon might have an interpretation different from his. Dean had no qualms about attributing to Nixon, remarks whose meaning were convenient for Dean. When Dean’s interpretation was challenged, he had no difficulty changing his initial wording.

No less indicative was another of Dean’s traits - he projects and misplaces events and words in a quite natural way. According to Dean’s testimony, when he introduced Gordon Liddy for the first time to John Mitchell, Nixon’s Re-election Campaign Manager, in order to unveil the break-in plan, Dean states that: “Mitchell was amazed. I gave him a look of bewilderment and he winked.” There was something basically wrong with Dean’s statement. Not with its’ grammar, but with its’ logic. Why would Dean give Mitchell a “look of bewilderment”? Dean had known of the break-in scheme before coming to the meeting with Mitchell. It was Dean who had recruited Liddy to work for Nixon’s Re-election Committee. The break-in plan was not a surprise to Dean. So, why would he give Mitchell “a look of bewilderment”? It was Mitchell who was bewildered by this new plan and rejected it twice. If one shifts the wording of the

sentence just a bit, one realizes it suddenly begins to make sense: “Mitchell was amazed. He gave me a look of bewilderment and I winked.” This minor and harmless example of projection might be amplified by many more serious samples from Dean’s testimony in which he attributes to other people his own plans and actions. This kind of *projection* of oneself on others represents the most typical trait of the psychopathic mechanism of self-defense – a “method by which a psychopathic personality defends itself from unpleasant impulses, tendencies and characteristics by way of a denial of their existence in him and at the same time attributing them to others.” (Walter C. Langer, “The Mind of Adolf Hitler)

Indicative in this case is the scandalous history of Howard Hunt’s note books. Last summer, during his testimony at the Erwin Senatorial Committee, Dean stated that he indignantly refused John Ehrlichman’s suggestion to destroy documents in Howard Hunt’s safe. Not even a year later, in November 1973, Dean had unexpectedly (for the prosecution), acknowledged that he had hidden Hunt’s notebooks, and in January 1974 secretly shredded them. Similarly, Dean accused Nixon of personally ordering him to compile “enemy lists” during his meeting with the president on September 15, 1972. But it turned out that Dean was preparing “enemy lists” prior to this meeting. John Mitchell’s lawyer, Peter Fleming, compared documents and tape recordings with Dean’s testimony and proved that Dean not only was not telling the truth about facts, but also demonstrated how Dean constantly was attributing his words to others.

In some cases of projection, Dean ascribes to himself other people’s words – a reversal of the pattern. We can call it an appropriation of someone else’s verbal property. On March 20, 1973, after conversations with President Nixon, Dean told Richard Moore, a White House official, that Nixon did not know anything about Watergate. “If this is so,” said Moore, “it means that the President is badly served.” A while later, Dean ran into Egal Krough (a White House official who had arranged Dean’s employment at the White House) and told him that the President did not know anything about Watergate and that the President “was badly served.”

Another case also deserves attention. Even before the start of the Senate investigation, Mitchell, during conversations with reporters said (this statement was published) that despite his repeated refusal to approve of Gordon Liddy’s break-in plans, “somebody was pushing, pushing and pushing.” Dean appropriated this phrase. Testifying about the planning of the Watergate break-in, Dean stated: “I do not know to this day who kept pushing for those plans - whether Liddy was pushing, or whether Magruder was pushing, or whether someone was pushing Magruder.” It was Dean who was “pushing” these plans, manipulating both Jeb Magruder and Gordon Liddy. It was Dean who prompted Liddy to prepare a new break-in plan after each rejection by John Mitchell. It was Dean who persuaded Magruder not to fire Liddy.

Dean is so unaware of his psychic deficiency that he nonchalantly reveals his schemes. Dean said that when he was five or six years old, he set a fire in the backyard of his parents’ home. For a long time he

denied his guilt and said that finally a Fire Marshall was called. Dean recalled “He must have been ten feet tall, wearing a big blue uniform. I can see him to this day. He told me: ‘Now John, you haven’t told your father the truth.’ The impact of the blue uniform as the authority of the law was enormous. I said to myself: The jig is up’.” From that time on Dean was setting fires in various “backyards”. At first, denying his guilt and then partially acknowledging it. With increasing inventiveness he attempts **to** defend himself, falsely accusing others, indignantly declaring that he “refuses to be a scapegoat”. His smiling face looked at us from the pages of newspapers and from TV screens. He did not feel any pangs of conscience. Just the opposite, he certainly assumed his new role **as** the president’s only accuser. He watched with satisfaction his own performance on television and then, after a hot bath and a massage, went to bed. He declared that he had slept well, which in this case we can believe.

Dean was remembered by his associates as a "man in a hurry - very eager to please the boss." He usually confused the boss’s motives with his own, and when rebuffed, would at first display amazement and indignation and then would turn against “the boss,” plotting against him as he previously plotted for him on mistaken assumptions. Unavoidably, he always mistook the wishes and thoughts of the “boss” for his own, and when the “boss” corrected him, Dean expressed sincere surprise and displeasure. Dean’s assumptions always turned out to be mistaken. Dean first married Karla Hennings, the wealthy daughter of a Missouri senator, and hastily concocted a business deal, misrepresenting her money as his. He briefly worked for the law firm of ‘Welch and Morgan’, and after six months, was fired for secretly plotting to aid a competitor in a case the firm was handling. Then he asked ‘Welch and Morgan’ to change the real reason for his firing in writing. He felt no qualms about “borrowing” election campaign money for his second honeymoon trip with second wife Maureen without consulting anyone. There could be no doubt that Dean did all these acts without clear criminal intent. He is simply incapable of distinguishing between what is appropriate behavior and what is not, as he is incapable of telling what is true and what is a sham, as he is also incapable of distinguishing reality from his distorted vision of it. Before the term “psychopath” or “sociopath” gained currency, Dean’s behavior was simply called moral imbecility.

After accusing President Nixon of various crimes, Dean unexpectedly pleaded with the Ervin Committee to “forgive” Nixon. It is quite obvious (especially if we recall how persistently Dean bargained for immunity during court proceedings) that Dean was not concerned in the least about the President’s fate and was not at all interested in soliciting forgiveness for Nixon. In a transfigured and projected form, he pleaded for forgiveness for himself. It would be easy to explain Dean’s transparent trick simply as hypocrisy, but when this concerns a psychopath, such explanation would be out of place. Because, as Dr. Clackley states, a “psychopath’s understanding of feeling contrary of hypocrisy, is so theoretically insubstantial that it is doubtful that we can apply to him what we usually call hypocrisy. Not having an understanding about moral values, the psychopath apparently is incapable of feeling in sufficient degree the nature and substance of the indignation of people affected by his behavior.”

While listening to questions at the trial of Mitchell and *Stan (Is this the correct name?)*, one inadvertently feels uncomfortable and tempted to cringe seeing the smiling Dean continue to equivocate and change his testimony, insisting on the validity of his other statements, while obviously being defeated by defense lawyers. It is interesting to note that Dean changes his testimony with striking ease. The tendency to rewrite or revise history is a typical psychopathic trait and Dean demonstrates that tendency in his “revelations” to the press, in hearings, statements, and in trial testimony. Actually, Dean was rewriting history much earlier - long before Watergate. As mentioned earlier, after he was fired from his job in the law firm, he asked this law firm to change the real reason for his firing in writing. Dean also asked Gordon Liddy’s lawyer to give him a written affidavit that he had not met Liddy, although such a meeting actually took place. It is necessary to cite more instances where Dean rewrites history. Dean also reveals a tendency to destroy evidence. Sometimes he destroys evidence himself, as it happened, for example, with Hunt’s notebooks. Sometimes he successfully manipulates other people to destroy evidence, as it happened with Patrick Grey.

A fateful moment in the whole Watergate affair was Dean’s encounter with Gordon Liddy. In the field of psychic aberrations, Liddy represents a peculiar phenomenon. People who know Liddy characterize him as a “cowboy” or as a “crazy” or as a “crazy of a special kind”. Liddy’s wife often found him polishing his guns. Appearing as a candidate at an election meeting, Liddy came with a gun and sometimes shot into the air to make a point. Of interest is the story of Jack Anderson. At one of election conferences, Jeb Magruder said that “Anderson constantly reveals secrets of the Republican Election Campaign and that we should ‘get rid’ of Anderson.” Liddy understood this remark by Magruder as an order to kill Anderson and excitedly announced it. Magruder had difficulty convincing Liddy that he did not have murder in mind. Disappointed, Liddy declared with annoyance in his voice - “Where I come from, ‘get rid of’ means to kill”, despite the fact that wherever Liddy comes from, he is not there for long. And, for obvious reasons, Liddy continues to entertain the romance and intrigue of cloak and dagger in his imagination.

This fascination with illusions had apparently deeply influenced Liddy. When John Dean and Liddy met, a disaster was bound to happen. While testifying about the preparation of the plans for the Watergate break-in, Dean declared: “I do not know to the present day who continued to push these plans – was Liddy pushing, or Magruder, or was someone pushing Magruder?” Being understandably reticent, Dean naturally did not mention that it was he who was pushing both Liddy and Magruder, manipulating both of them and skillfully playing on Liddy’s aberrations, and influencing the short-sighted and inexperienced Magruder, who appears now as a pitiful victim of two psychologically abnormal people. There was a moment, missed by Magruder, when he almost fired Liddy. Magruder apparently felt some admiration for Liddy who surrounded himself with an aura of heroic romanticism. In an outburst of this admiration Magruder put his hand on his hero’s shoulder in a friendly manner. Liddy suddenly turned to Magruder,

hissed angrily: “Take your hand away, otherwise I’ll kill you.” Magruder got scared and wanted to fire this “nut,” but the omnipresent Dean intervened and talked Magruder into forgiving Liddy.

It is worthwhile mentioning that Liddy did not react angrily towards Dean’s friendly hand. After each one of Mitchell’s refusals to approve any of Liddy’s proposals, Dean, while putting his friendly hand on Liddy’s shoulder, encouraged the disappointed hero and hinted at a better chance next time. There was another lost chance to prevent the Watergate Scandal about which Mitchell, with a sigh of regret, told the Senate Committee. Mitchell said that instead of saying “no” to Liddy’s plans several times he should have ‘thrown this nut out the window.’ And it would have been even better if someone advised Mitchell to also throw Dean out the same window for full measure. This would have saved Magruder from falling into the psychopathic trap in which he found himself. But history, unfortunately, does not correct itself by “ifs”.

Gordon Strom, in his testimony, said that it was always surprising for him to notice how well Dean remembered who was doing what. Apparently, it did not occur to him that Dean lived in his own world of intrigues and knew precisely what component of this intrigue must be galvanized into action and when. Like all psychopaths, Dean is exceptionally egocentric and in his scheme of intrigues he quite deservedly occupied the central place. He was the chief inspirational figure behind the scene not only of the Watergate cover-up, to which almost confessed, but also of the original break-in to the Democratic Party Headquarters, which unavoidably must surface at the trial in the testimonies of Magruder and Liddy. (President Carter was asked at a press conference years later whether he could persuade Liddy to tell what he knew about the break-in. Carter replied, “According to my reading of Liddy’s mind, Liddy would never talk.” But in his January 29, 2001 sworn testimony in a Philadelphia court, Liddy for the first time stated that the Watergate break-in had been “John Dean’s operation.” Liddy said that, in 1991, he read the book, “The Silent Coup” by Len Colodny which linked Dean’s fiancée Maureen Biner to a call-girl ring that was used by the staff of the Democratic National Committee. Liddy further told the court, “I said to myself, ‘Oh, My God!’ My eyes opened. This was a John Dean op.” Liddy testified that the photographs were located in the desk of Ida Wells, one of the Committee’s secretaries. Ida Wells was suing Liddy for defamation, seeking \$5.1 million in damages, because he publicly linked her to the prostitution operation. Dean and his wife Maureen sued St. Martin’s Press which published “The Silent Coup”, stating that the book claim that Dean had masterminded the break-in was “baloney.” The publisher settled the libel suit in 1997. Liddy testified that John W. Dean III, who had recruited Liddy to work for the Nixon Reelection Committee, told him at the time:

“An all-out offensive and defensive political operation with a \$1 million budget was needed for the 1972 election.”

Liddy testified that he understood only years later that Dean had wanted to retrieve some photographs, which linked Dean’s fiancée and future wife, Maureen Biner, to a prostitution ring serving the staff of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex. Dean, of course, did not tell Liddy that he

wanted to retrieve Maureen Biner's photos from the Watergate Headquarters. This important revelation was buried in the *New York Times* back page and ignored by most of the media.¹

Dean probably also wanted to please his "boss" (that is President Nixon) and Deans was certain that Nixon would approve of Dean's spying on Democrats when Nixon would learn about it. Within all of the Watergate stories there was a lot of tragic irony. But, perhaps the most tragic was the fact that the Nixon was so unaware of Dean's intrigues that he assigned Dean the criminal to catch a criminal. One circumstance was conducive to Dean's intrigues - he used the trust of people who considered him the President's Lawyer. This shrewd use of his "President's Lawyer" title by Dean could not but mislead many honest and well-meaning people. All these people, including the President, had an assigned place in Dean's psychopathic scheme without ever being aware of it. All were busy dealing with thousands of important problems of foreign and domestic issues. These problems were of no interest to Dean and were replaced by Watergate, "enemy lists" and other intrigues. The title, "President's lawyer", in reality is of limited importance. But in the Dean's scheme, it acquired a threatening significance. Dean used this title freely and with criminal shrewdness, utilizing ambivalent hints, careful and probing remarks, false statements, and characteristic of Dean, the appearance of importance and poise. Dean demonstrated the performance of an important role during the course of his testimony.

Because Dean had no intention of winding up on the defendant's bench, he used his impressive skill at shrewdness and sophistry to cover up his actual role in the Watergate scandal. But when the whole affair began to crumble, he declared his refusal to be the "scapegoat." It was necessary for him to invent a "scapegoat" and to construct a new scheme of events in order to absolve himself by accusing innocent people. A scheme, once it emerges in the mind of a psychopath, continuous to acquire a certain shape until new circumstances force him to construct a new scheme. A new version of events emerges in his mind and replaces the preceding scheme. The new version, in turn, demands the destruction of evidence connected to the old version. The objective truth does not exist. It changes depending on the circumstance. But while a certain version exists in the psychopath's mind he accepts it as reality and quite sincerely is infuriated and annoyed when someone does not agree with him. As is typical for a psychopath, Dean now believes in what he is saying. He is not lying in the common sense of this word. He tells his "truth". He said: "I know what I know. I did not fear to be caught lying during interrogation. Indeed to tell the truth – the easiest thing in the world."

Now Dean is accustomed to believe in his new "truth". Now he sees himself as a kind of Messiah since he got used to his new role. He said: The "American people would recover only when we discover the very root of this situation. I see myself in the role of helping in this process". Dean presents himself as the person who had a "restraining influence on many wild and crazy ideas in the White House. This ridiculous distortion of the truth would have been simply amusing if this sickening illusion didn't produce an appalling impression on those people who accepted Dean as a truthful witness. The mysterious

atmosphere of secret intrigues in the White House depicted by Dean during his monotonous and lifeless testimony disturbed many people who apparently did not realize that this picture was not only far from reality, but simply represented a perverted picture of life in the White House that exited Den's mind.

It might appear as a fantastic aberration that such an insignificant personality as John Dean could have created such a disaster, that he could initiate such a turmoil, and ignite so much passion and suspicion to such an **extent**, that it clouded our minds and created a danger to the stability of the government, the country as a whole and even international relations. And, this is indeed what happened because of the Watergate scandal. It is enough to recall other psychopaths who lived and operated in other countries and in other circumstances when they had caused tragedies which were immeasurably greater than Watergate. The ability of psychopaths to create misery for millions of people, to cloud their minds and lead them to catastrophes is enormous – as Hitler and Stalin had demonstrated with abundant clarity. One thing is clear – psychopaths pose a danger not only to totalitarian but also to democracies societies.

It is enough to take a look at such headlines as “Could Nixon Survive Dean?” which appeared on the pages of newspapers and on the covers of magazines, in order to seriously ponder the absurdity and sickening nature of the current state of affairs. Until now, President Nixon has revealed the will and stamina in the face of the storm of assaults coming from his domestic and foreign enemies. But the danger posed by Dean's accusations continues to hang as a threatening shadow over the President and over the country. It endangers all us. Dean himself became an almost forgotten figure in the phantasmagoria which was initiated by him. But his accusations acquired their own dynamics and are being used by irresponsible trash slingers, creating a sick atmosphere of witch hunting. Dean's accusations serve as an inducement for obsessive attempts to discover evil-doers in all corners of the social and political life of the country.

Press reports that Dean had pleaded guilty to numerous crimes were buried in the back pages, if mentioned at all. In addition, Dean was assigned an office in the prosecutors section of the Justice Department with his nameplate on the door, as if he was one of the prosecutors. And, as the result of a plea bargain, his sentence was reduced to four months in a privileged prison facility. Those who exhibit an unstoppable eagerness and stubbornness in search of new sensational crimes now avoid mentioning Dean, as if sensing the possibility of winding up in an uncomfortable position themselves. We must return to the roots of the Watergate malignancy – to Dean. And, before anything else, we need experienced psychiatrists who could diagnose Dean's psychiatric condition and at the same time reinstate our own mental balance.

¹. *The New York Times*, January 30, 2001, p. A-19